

Nashville, Tennessee



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ **Ricky George**, of Vicksburg, Miss., spent a week working in the Baptist Joint Committee's communications office as part of a summer internship at Associated Baptist Press. George will be a senior at Baylor University this fall.

◆ Superior Court Judge **Robert H. O'Brien** has ruled that the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles must submit to a lengthy environmental review before it can demolish the 120-year-old St. Vibiana's Cathedral. O'Brien criticized the archdiocese for starting to build the cathedral's bell tower without first obtaining a permit. A spokesman for the archdiocese said the ruling was an "unfortunate blow to religious liberty."

◆ **Billy Graham** distanced himself from a recent Southern Baptist Convention resolution urging that evangelistic efforts be directed at Jews. The noted evangelist said he had "never taken part in organizations or projects that especially targeted Jews."

◆ **Yu Nguk Ding**, a 72-year-old retired nurse in Singapore, was convicted recently of owning a banned Bible and other literature published by her religious denomination, the Jehovah's Witnesses. The woman faces up to two years in jail after being convicted under Singapore's Undesirable Publications Act. Δ

Religious beliefs impact political choices, survey says

Religious beliefs impact the political views of Americans, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

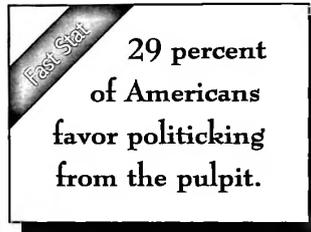
The survey indicated that many Americans are influenced by their religious beliefs when forming opinions on issues such as abortion, welfare, gay marriages and the death penalty. Religious views also shape opinions on political candidates.

Respondents who said their religion plays an important role in their lives are more conservative. The conservatism of white evangelical Protestants is the most powerful religious force in politics today, the survey said. White evangelical Protestants represent 24 percent of registered voters, up from 19 percent in 1987. Baptists made up 18 percent of respondents.

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said trying to divide mainline and evangelical Protestants skewed the survey's results. He noted that the groups often overlap.

"For too many, 'evangelical' has become nothing more than a political label," he said. "Yet many of us in the 'mainline denominations,' born-again believers in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, resist, resent and despise the sort of political use of their faith by many right-wing zealots."

Mark J. Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, questioned the survey's conclusion that people who cared about their religious beliefs are more "conservative."



"It's way too glib a reading of the information," Pelavin said.

The survey showed more acceptance of churches speaking out on political issues. By a margin of 54 percent to 43 percent the respondents think churches should express opinions on politics, compared

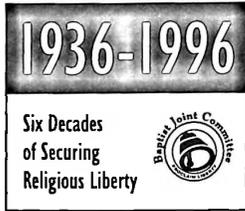
with a 1965 poll that by a margin of 53 percent to 40 percent said churches should keep out of political matters.

Outright politicking from the pulpit is now favored by 29 percent. The report came to this conclusion by asking respondents if it is ever right "for clergymen to discuss political candidates or issues from the pulpit." A spokeswoman for Pew said that it may have been better to differentiate between candidates and issues.

David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said it is a healthy trend for churches to become more involved in political issues but not in electioneering.

Of those who attend church at least once a month, 21 percent said clergy speak out on "candidates and elections," and 78 percent of those said it was a good thing, while 14 percent said it was not.

"White evangelicals are more conservative, more Republican and more anti-Clinton than any other major religious group in America," the report notes. While 54 percent of the public approves of the job President Clinton is doing, only one-third of "committed evangelicals" concur. White evangelical Protestants favor Bob Dole over Clinton by a margin of 60 percent to 36 percent. Δ



As early as 1957, the Baptist Joint Committee began to anticipate the possibility of Roman Catholic presidential candidates in the 1960 election. Executive Director C. Emanuel Carlson urged the BJC to avoid exploiting the religious issue despite the fact that certain Catholic groups were mounting a drive on behalf of potential Roman Catholic candidates. By early 1959, Sen. John F. Kennedy had emerged as a leading candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination and the BJC's concern centered on his views of the church-state relationship.

Despite the candidate's declarations of commitment to the American separation principle, the BJC continued to voice concern over the potential conflict between a Catholic president and his church when their views might differ.

After the election, the BJC applauded Kennedy's church-state record. At the March 1961 meeting, the BJC praised Kennedy for his opposition to aid to sectarian institutions and stated that the BJC saw "in President Kennedy clear evidence of recognition of the basic importance of the principle of separation of church and state." Δ

Expanded membership role weighed for BJC auxiliary

An enhanced role for the Religious Liberty Council as a vehicle for individuals to participate in the Baptist Joint Committee was discussed at the RLC's annual meeting in Richmond, Va.

Patricia Ayres, a co-chairperson of the RLC, reported that a BJC task force looking at the issue of individual membership will recommend to the agency's board in October that the RLC's role as a membership-based auxiliary be expanded.

Founded in 1989 to support the BJC and to advance the historic Baptist commitment to religious liberty, the RLC provides representation on the BJC for Baptists who support the agency individually, through churches and through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

In other actions, the RLC

- re-elected the organization's current slate of officers. Serving as co-chairpersons of the RLC are Ayres, a Texas laywoman; Hardy Clemons, a South Carolina pastor; and Gardner Taylor, pastor-emeritus of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y. Serving as secretary is Jerry Martin, a Maryland pastor.

- named four people to new or additional three-year terms on the BJC board. Elected to a first term was Susan Paynter of Jackson, Miss. Re-elected for additional three-year terms were Babs Baugh of San Antonio, Cecil Sherman of Atlanta and Bill Wilson of Waynesboro, Va.

- watched a new religious liberty video, *The Intersection*, featuring veteran broadcast journalist Bill Moyers and BJC Executive Director James M. Dunn. The video is a joint production of the BJC and the Division of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches, U.S.A. It is available, along with a discussion guide, from both organizations.

- heard a report from Dunn concerning the agency's 60th anniversary Religious Liberty Conference scheduled Oct. 6-8 in Washington, D.C. Dunn also announced that the BJC, in conjunction with its 60th anniversary, is kicking off a \$600,000 endowment campaign.

New bill proposal targets religious charities, schools

Republican lawmakers introduced a measure that would provide tax credits for individuals who give money to certain charities and would create a voucher pro-

gram allowing grants for tuition payments at private and parochial schools.

The sweeping "Project for American Renewal" was introduced June 25 by Sen. Daniel Coats, R-Ind., and Rep. John Kasich, R-Ohio. At a press conference, they said the proposal would hopefully create an election-year debate about how to provide "effective compassion."

During his statement in the Senate, Coats said that utilizing faith-based charities instead of government institutions means that "we can bring to bear not just efforts to meet the material needs of individuals, but also the spiritual needs of individuals."

The package contains 16 separate pieces of legislation. One would allow 100 school districts to experiment for five years with a voucher program before a commission would evaluate the results. Districts that serve the highest percentage of low-income families would be eligible to receive up to \$5 million in grants.

These grants would provide vouchers for parents to send their child to private schools, including those that are religious. Several recent attempts to implement a voucher program have failed in the Senate.

Coats said that the Supreme Court has upheld the use of vouchers where the educational choice is up to the parent. A Baptist church-state attorney disagreed.

J. Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said the Supreme Court has not ruled on the constitutionality of vouchers. "It's unconstitutional to funnel tax dollars to support religious teaching. The use of vouchers doesn't change that fact," he said.

Walker said that when "90 percent of the money winds up in parochial schools, it's curious to talk about a meaningful choice."

The tax provision would provide a \$500 tax credit for individuals contributing to a charitable organization that spends at least 75 percent of its income on poverty programs. Married couples would receive a \$1,000 tax credit.

The measure would be paid for by repealing the earned income credit for individuals without children, cutting corporate tax loopholes and by reducing spending levels for food stamps and money going to states under the Social Security Act.

Another provision would utilize religious groups to aid welfare recipients and non-violent criminal offenders. Δ

Reflections

James M. Dunn

Executive Director



Never before have I used "Reflections" for blatant begging.

But then, never before have I been 64 years old. That has me thinking about how to be sure this watch dog keeps barking.

We are only one generation away from losing a passionately held belief. This is especially true of beliefs based on history and theology. Henry Ford disciples abound holding that "history is bunk." For most modern disciples doctrine is deadly dull.

Many folks have forgotten, if they ever knew, the Baptist-defining dedication to church-state separation. You know the fickle mood of the majority and the havoc it wreaks. I know that you, dear readers, care passionately about religious freedom.

Frankly, I find the most dogged dedication to Baptist principles in those my age and older. Many "boomers" and "busters" were never exposed to doctrinal study courses, Baptist history or denominational distinctives. They cannot even identify Roger Williams, Isaac Backus and John Leland.

So, we have a window of opportunity to plant a tree that will bloom after we're dead and gone, to perpetuate something worth saving.

We, the BJCPA, are kicking off a \$600,000 endowment drive at the October 6-8, 1996, Religious Liberty Conference. There's no fancy fund-raising campaign. No consultants. No spending money to get money. We believe in simply telling the truth and trusting you.

This modest goal of \$600,000 is set to guarantee an ongoing witness to historic Baptist activism on religious

liberty. We can do it. If not now, when? If not through the BJC, how? The Baptist Joint Committee is the only church office in the nation that works only on religious liberty and its corollary, church-state separation. We must do it.

Reflecting upon the vitality of this agency in the 1990s is cause for pause. We've never been stronger. We're here to stay.

Many of you have sent your gifts, large and great, though not so big. From a Southern Baptist executive's widow comes several hundred dollars a year. A distinguished scholar and his wife send the BJC \$100 a month. A large number of missionaries send regular contributions.

Dozens of smaller churches unrelentingly send monthly support without praise or special attention. All sorts of Baptists stand with us.

A former BJC board member and his wife have already given the first \$42,500 toward the goal of \$600,000. They challenge us to match this gift before the October birthday celebration.

If you want to be a part of this important groundbreaking (for an endowment not a building) send your tax deductible contribution to the Baptist Joint Committee, 200 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002. Mark it clearly "Endowment." For every gift of \$100 or more we'll send you *The Intersection* — a brand new religious liberty video in which Bill Moyers and I discuss Baptist principles at play in the crossroads of church and state.

Together, we will do it. Δ

Quoting

A person cannot be a good Christian unless he is a good citizen. No matter how pious or how full of prayer; no matter how long his string of perfect attendance pins in Sunday school; no matter how often he sings in the choir or how often he goes to the revival meeting, if a person is not deeply involved in the political life of his nation, state and community, he is a sorry Christian.

... You and I must be responsible, active citizens, not only because it is the direct command of scripture, but because it is the only way in the 20th Century that we can fulfill the command to love.

William M. Pinson Jr.
in Politics: A Guidebook
for Christians
Edited by James M. Dunn
and published by the
Christian Life Commission
of the Baptist General
Convention of Texas
1970

**Baptist Joint
Committee
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- ◆ Alliance of Baptists
- ◆ American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
- ◆ Baptist General Conference
- ◆ Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
- ◆ National Baptist Convention of America
- ◆ National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc.
- ◆ National Missionary Baptist Convention
- ◆ North American Baptist Conference
- ◆ Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.
- ◆ Religious Liberty Council
- ◆ Seventh Day Baptist General Conference
- ◆ Southern Baptist state conventions/churches

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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BOOK REVIEW

Understanding the Christian Right

John C. Green, The American Jewish Committee, New York, 1996, 43 pp., \$2.



The Christian Right arouses strong feelings — from devotion and loyalty to disdain and opposition. John C. Green, political science professor at the University of Akron, offers a much-needed rational approach to the movement through a sociological look at its history, its relationship with the Jewish community and its prospects for the future.

Green focuses much of this helpful book on the history and membership of the Christian Right. Although the movement has embraced different "causes," its membership and tactics remain strikingly similar to its roots in early 20th century America. Green compares the movement's members to the general population as well as the Republican Party. Most of the statistics presented fit the stereotypical image of a right-wing activist, but one fact is curious. Christian Right activists gave only a 55 percent positive rating to Christian Right interest groups. One has to wonder why activists do not fully support their organizations.

Green devotes only a short chapter to the Christian Right and Jews. He states that "neither the movement nor its mass constituency has completely shed the anti-Semitism associated with Christian orthodoxy and with the antecedents of the movement." The recent Southern Baptist Convention resolution targeting Jews for evangelization tends to confirm the thesis of this chapter.

Finally, Green discusses the recent and possible future impact of the Christian Right on the political scene. Candidates backed by the Christian Right in 1994 had a 55 percent success rate. Pat Buchanan's and Pat Robertson's substantial, if unsuccessful, bids for the Republican presidential nomination demonstrate the potential power of the movement. No one can deny the impact of the Christian Coalition on the GOP, with 25 percent of the the 1992 Republican National Convention delegates identifying with the movement.

The Christian Right has an attenuated notion of separation of church and state. It wants its brand of religion to permeate every aspect of society, starting with education. Green points out that the movement's start was fueled by the 1962 Supreme Court decision that banned state-sponsored prayer in public schools. The movement has been criticized because of "arguments over the meaning of separation of church and state [that] raise concerns that the movement opposes religious pluralism." The movement leaders' Christian nation rhetoric scares a lot of people. Unfortunately, the Christian Right continues to advocate the forced merger of church and state.

Green realizes that the movement has the potential to achieve some of its goals and wrote this book to help combat this possibility. He states that "the chief obstacle to such an eventuality is an effective opposition, built on an accurate understanding of the movement." This book provides critical information that will enable the reader to understand better the nature of the Christian Right. A

— Jennifer Peterson
BJC Intern

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